

House Commerce Committee Hearing
Representative Meisner, Chair
April 17, 9:00 a.m.
Entrepreneurship

The Rock Financial JA Finance Park experiential learning program gives middle grade students a real-world opportunity to prepare for the personal financial issues and choices students will face the rest of their lives. This unique program links classroom curriculum with a hands-on interactive experience. The Finance Park program provides students the opportunity to become “adults for a day” and develop a monthly budget based on a scenario given to them. They then determine their monthly net income, and shop for housing, transportation, utilities, clothing, food, etc. at the fourteen different storefronts in the Rock Financial JA Finance Park. The facility in Michigan is one of only 8 around the world.

Businesses in the metro Detroit community have made a substantial investment in this project including a lead sponsorship by Dan Gilbert and Rock Financial of \$750,000. They see the benefit of educating youth on the values of sound financial literacy, the importance of staying in school, and preparing for the entrepreneurial world of work. Investments in the construction, and equipping the program totaled over \$2 million dollars.

But additional support is needed to bring this program to thousands of children each school year. The capacity in the park is 15,000 students per year. Generous corporate and foundation sponsors have provided 2,300 scholarships this year. Students have come to the park from Oak Park, Detroit, Flint, Chelsea, Whitmore Lake, Plymouth, Canton, Burton, and Brighton. Requests come into the office almost daily. The cost of \$40 per student is modest and includes the day long experience, student workbooks and teacher guides for pre and post instruction. A second finance park site is in the early planning stages in Grand Rapids.

We must work together to educate our youth and turn the tide of high unemployment rates in some of the state’s largest urban areas. Providing this experience in middle school and subsequent experiences in high school can make a difference in the future of our children. JA’s workforce readiness high school programs provide business role models in the classroom who instruct students on entrepreneurialism, economics, financial literacy, work and career life skills and ethics. These JA traditional programs delivered in the classroom have a lasting impact on high school students throughout the state.

JA's Success Skills focuses on developing students' interpersonal effectiveness. Students examine how their interpersonal skills can be applied in the workplace, and practice their skills in a variety of activities, including mock job interviews. They begin work on a skills portfolio that they can carry with them into the workplace when seeking employment.

Job Shadows conducted in business settings encourage young people to see the connection between what they are learning in school and what skills are needed in the workplace. Students visit businesses and are paired up with employees for an up close look at what skills are necessary to obtain the position, and what attributes are necessary to be successful in the job. The Job Shadow is a great way to reinforce what educators are teaching by taking students to the workplace. The importance of doing well in school, thinking about your career, and the value of completing your education take on a whole new meaning through this program.

Both these high school programs impart workforce readiness skills aligned with the requirements of the Workforce Investment Act. These programs affecting the younger youth, defined in the Act as ages 14 – 18, provide the groundwork for completing high school, pursuing advanced education, or entering the workforce. The business and community role models employed in the delivery of the curriculum add validity, and an approach to the students' future often not found in their homes.

In closing, Mark and I would like to thank you for this opportunity to provide an overview of the JA programs in Michigan and to discuss how we might partner to bring these important business and personal financial responsibility issues to students in Michigan.

JA's mission is to inspire and prepare young people to succeed in a global economy and we ***believe kids are everyone's business***. Thank you Chairman Meisner and members of the Commerce Committee for your consideration.